

# King County Prosecutor solution to curb increase in youth domestic violence cases

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The King County Prosecutor was seeing a disturbing trend in specific domestic violence cases. How Prosecutor Dan Satterberg is trying to solve that issue—a Proposed Family Intervention and Restorative Services Center—was the subject of a briefing today in the Metropolitan King County Council’s Law, Justice, Health and Human Services Committee.

In Satterberg’s proposed program, juveniles who have been arrested on certain misdemeanor DV offenses would be presented to the Family Intervention and Restorative Services Center (FIRS) first instead of being admitted to secure detention, law enforcement. At FIRS, a 24 hour-a-day/7 day-a-week center located adjacent to the juvenile detention facility, a licensed social worker would address the juvenile’s immediate needs (rest, food, shelter), and then assess the juvenile. The center staff would then work to reunite juveniles with their families. In addition, respite care would also be available for a cooling-off period and to allow time to assess next steps.

Satterberg told the committee that, while planning the program, county staff identified that the physical space required for a non-secure respite facility currently exists in the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention’s (DAJD) Juvenile Detention facility and can be made available quickly with nominal capital investment. The PAO notes that DAJD is committed to repurposing this space and to re-training existing detention staff to work with youth housed in a non-secure FIRS unit. Superior Court Probation Services are committed to redeploying existing probation officers specifically for this project.

The Prosecutor is proposing to use Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) funds for the FIRS project, which he envisions serving approximately 500 youth and families each year.

“Dan Satterberg and his staff have presented us with another excellent proposal to reduce the number of juvenile domestic violence cases,” said Committee Chair Kathy Lambert. “Counseling for youth who witness domestic violence is so important. The cycle of violence needs to be broken quickly. Getting help for youth who act out violently to family members is also vital. I am increasingly encouraged by the creative programs that we are using to help youth and families.”

Since 2014, the Prosecutor's Juvenile Division, along with the juvenile court, has seen a startling increase in the number of juvenile domestic violence (DV) case referrals from police agencies. Unlike the traditional DV cases seen in adult court, juvenile DV rarely involves intimate partner violence. The majority of the cases involved youth acting out in ways against their parents or siblings that meet the legal definition of a crime of violence against a "family or household member."

Families call police when they are in crisis, seeking help for their children and for themselves. Current state domestic violence law directs police who respond to such calls to make a mandatory arrest of the aggressor if the perpetrator is over 16 (it is discretionary when the juvenile is 15 or younger, but the arrest can still occur).

In the city of Seattle, 38 percent of all juvenile arrests for "crimes against persons" were for domestic violence related offenses. Furthermore, juvenile DV accounts for 17 percent of all admissions to juvenile detention and 32 percent of all new bookings. Families turn to the juvenile justice system for help, but almost none want their children to end up with a criminal record. The result is that almost half of all juvenile DV referrals result in no charges filed, and in the cases that are filed, most end up in dismissals for this same reason.

In briefing the committee today, Satterberg told members about the program he would like to implement to reduce these cases. The system would be based on a program being used in Pima County, Arizona, the Domestic Violence Alternative Center (DVAC), which has been used to reduce the number of juvenile DV booking from over 1,000 youth annually, to just 82 in 2012.